

# Royal Society of Victoria.

---

## ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS

OF

The President,

THE REV. J. J. BLEASDALE D.D.

[Delivered to the Members of the Royal Society, at the Anniversary Meeting,  
held on the 4th May, 1865.]

GENTLEMEN,

It has ever been the custom of this Society for the President to deliver an address to the members at the commencement of his year of office. In taking my place this evening among you in the most honorable position to which you could raise me, the more honorable for the great men who have preceded me in it, I feel that many duties commensurate therewith have devolved upon me, and which I hope to be able to fulfil during this year, under the blessing of Providence, and with your earnest and generous co-operation.

Before entering upon a brief review of the labours of the Royal Society during the past year, and the advances made by science in the several departments whose objects we embrace, I will at the outset invite your attention for a moment to a subject which closely interests us all, viz., the present position and prospects of the Royal Society itself.

For this purpose it will be necessary to ask you to go back a few years, and recall the efforts which were then made by several of our officers and members, and, no doubt, with the best intentions, to swell the list of members, and give the Society all the appearance of a popular and flourishing institution. As a consequence numbers were induced to join, and were duly elected. Not a few of us at the time this was going forward pointed out that "numbers" were *not* strength in cases like our own. For while some joined with the main view of helping us with their subscriptions, and receiving copies of our Transactions as their only return, many many quite mistaking, or never having had experience of the working and nature of learned societies, were soon disappointed, and fell off in their attendance at our monthly meetings on account of the technical nature of the papers read, and the discussions on them, dry and uninteresting in proportion as they are learned, which necessarily fill up the greater portion of the time at our periodical meetings. At one time we *seemed* strong from the number of members, and the amount of entrance fees and subscriptions; but ere long it became evident, from the impossibility of rendering our meetings *popular*, as the phrase goes, that the attendance of our non-scientific friends was falling off. Had a record of attendance been kept, it would be at this day a curious and instructive document. Members of this class then became loath to renew their annual subscriptions, and with the falling off in numbers and money, came the cry that the Society itself was doomed. Writers followed writers in the public papers, seemingly to write us out of existence if possible. Latterly they have given it up, whether because they consider it a hopeless task to kill the Society out, or because they have discovered that there is real vitality in the body, now that its adventitious swathings and trappings have been torn off. At different times it has been said that we derived

a sort of vicarious life from one or other great name, which stood in our foremost rank, or from some happy accident, which, if removed, would cause the whole constitution to fade away into oblivion.

The labours of last year, to which I shall soon have to advert, will tell first how the Royal Society prospered under a great *scientific name*; how we got the measure of our real strength when we had come to know the full measure of our weakness; how we found our feet on firm ground, our knees strong, and our heads clear; how we made an estimate of our total strength; and then, gentlemen of the Society, how you dared to commit the destinies of this hopeful year to me and my colleagues in the Council. From the dislike which I always had of seeing men enter who had little or no fitness for helping in the work of such a body—and, may I say, from the gladness I felt in seeing them withdraw—I may, perhaps, be exposed to exaggerate when I congratulate you with all my heart on the present state of vitality in this our Royal Society. My reasons for this congratulation will be supplied by the matters which I have condensed, as much as in my power, into the paragraphs on which I must now enter.

At every one of the nineteen Ordinary Meetings we had read one or more papers, each and all of an interesting and useful character.

And perhaps the most striking of the many indications of real vitality may be found in the fact that I can announce that a new volume of our Transactions will soon be in your hands, which, for solid matter in a condensed form, is second to none which has preceded it: and which is a subject of congratulation in another sense, because it enables us to reciprocate our labours with the many cognate societies over the civilized world with which we correspond. I am also enabled to say that it will soon be followed by another

volume, which will bring our publications to date. Thenceforward it is in contemplation to publish our Transactions in pamphlet form, either monthly or quarterly, and complete a volume every year ; thus placing before the public the everyday work of the Society, and affording the authors an opportunity of having the subjects they have treated thrown open to general discussion while still possessing their original freshness and interest. For several years past, with only the exception of the one just ended, this chair was filled by Sir Henry Barkly, our able Governor, of whose excellent management, and the ability he brought to bear on many of the most interesting of our papers and discussions, it may be out of place for me to descant. The Royal Society owes much to him.

On his resignation, Professor M'Coy, my immediate predecessor, was, I think, quite unanimously elected, and certainly the Society have to congratulate themselves on the results of the year, no less than on the *éclat* of his name and his *prestige* as a man of science.

Having premised thus much of our present condition, and a word or two of our future intentions, permit me now to lay before you a very brief outline of the subjects treated of and discussed during the by-gone year.

At the first Ordinary Meeting, held on the 16th May, a paper was read by W. H. Archer, Esq., Registrar-General, "On a Genus of Coleoptera, hitherto unknown in Victoria," of which large and beautiful specimens were exhibited.

This was followed by an exhaustive paper "On the Surface and Underground Drainage of Melbourne," by A. K. Smith, Esq., C.E. This valuable paper led to much discussion by the members, and as one evening was not sufficient for it, it was adjourned to our next meeting, with a direction that it should have precedence of all papers. In fact, this paper and the discussion upon it, led to an animated discus-

sion in the public papers, and it appears to have furnished the ideas for nearly all that has appeared in the public prints on that important subject ever since.

On the 6th June the adjourned discussion on the above paper took place, and entirely precluded any other scientific business. In the course of this night's discussion, Dr. Crooke set forth a suggestion for the drainage of the heavy floods of the Yarra, by cutting in directly at right angles to the river opposite Dight's mills, intercepting the tributary known as the Merri Creek, and conducting the storm and flood waters into Batman's Swamp, and so by the river into Hobson's Bay. This scheme, though not objected to on the score of fitness, was generally considered to involve too large an outlay in the construction of the channel.

On the 27th June the Secretary, R. L. J. Ellery, Esq., Astronomer to the Colony of Victoria, read a learned paper "On the Recent Determination of the Sun's Distance."

At the meeting on the 18th July, a valuable letter from Dr. Ferdinand Mueller was read, treating of the Poison Plant, so destructive to sheep (*gastrolobium grandiflorum*), from the neighbourhood of the Burdekin, Queensland.

At this meeting Wheatstone's Exploder and Abel's Patent Fuse were exhibited and explained by the Secretary.

8th August. At this meeting two very interesting papers were read, one by T. Harrison, Esq., entitled, "Notes on the Geology of Hobart Town," illustrated with maps and collections of fossils. At the close, Professor M'Coy described and named the fossils exhibited.

The other, "On the Yarra Floods and their Remedy," was by Robert Adams, Esq., and caused much interest, and the discussion was adjourned.

29th August opened with the discussion on Mr. Adam's paper, "Yarra Floods and their Remedy." This was followed by a learned paper from Professor Halford, "On the

Structure of Cartilage, as developed by the newly invented application of Magenta Dye," illustrated by microscopic specimens and diagrams. This able paper appears to clear up doubts which have long existed on the nature of the structure of cartilage, and the formation of bone, and, I venture to hope, it will be this year followed by others clearing disputed points in histology, and yielding many new and valuable articles on the diagnosis of diseased structures, and enlarging the sphere of the learned professor's usefulness far beyond the precincts of the University.

19th September. Professor M'Coy read an instructive paper "On an Australian Fish" (*genus arripis*), illustrated by preserved specimens and diagrams. Mr. Ellery at this meeting gave an account of Spectrum Analysis, as applied to Astronomy—a subject replete with curious interest, and concerning which I trust he will from time to time communicate his discoveries and results.

10th October. At this meeting I read a short paper, by permission (without notice), upon "The Desirability of holding an Exhibition of Colonial Gems, whether wrought or in their natural state; as also of Colonial Works in Jewellery, &c., &c."

On this occasion we received a Report from the Exploration Committee on the supposed discovery by Messrs. Giles and Conn of white men's graves near Cooper's Creek, which was brought up by Dr. Mueller. This was adopted, and a perfect copy sent to Mr. Augustus Gregory, Surveyor-General of Queensland, to obtain his opinion as to the utility of further investigation concerning Leichardt's fate.

31st October. There were three papers read at this meeting:—

1st. "Notes on the Tidal Phenomena of Hobson's Bay; with reference to the various suggested drainage schemes for the valley and basin of the River Yarra," was read by T. E.

Rawlinson, Esq., C.E., and listened to with much interest by the members.

2nd. The next was a paper entitled, "Notes on the Wealden Formation of England, as in some measure illustrated by the Physical Features of Port Phillip Bay," by Thomas Harrison, Esq.

3rd. R. L. J. Ellery, Esq., Government Astronomer, read a paper "On Saxby's Weather System." The purport of the paper was to show the vagueness of Mr. Saxby's generalities, and the looseness of the so-called system in deduction, and the unscientific character of his prognostications.

21st November. A. K. Smith, Esq., C.E., read an elaborate paper "On the Underground Drainage of Melbourne."

This was the last paper of the session. Total, nineteen papers, besides adjourned discussions. But not alone in papers read before the Society have our members been advancing science during the past year; for I have to direct attention to several works which far overstep the limits contemplated at our meetings, and by our Transactions. Still, most certainly, it belongs to an occasion like this to notice them, because they advance objects which the Royal Society embraces, and proceed from members actively in communication with it.

First of these is an elaborate work by the Rev. Julian E. Tennison Woods, of Penola, on the Geology of Certain Parts of South Australia, a work which has been received both in Europe and this country as an important contribution to geological science, and calculated to throw light upon several misty points in the general geography of Australia.

The next in order is the fine volume which has been placed in my hands by its learned author, for presentation this evening, on "The Plants Indigenous to the Colony of Victoria," and comprising sixty-six lithograms, described by Dr. Ferd. Mueller, Ph. D., M.D., &c., one of my most illus-

trious predecessors in the chair. Being enabled to place it before you for inspection, I am spared a task that I am hardly at all able for, viz., attempting to give you an idea of its utility, or of the most exquisite manner in which the plates have been prepared and executed. It may be doubted if any work exists on which so much labour has been bestowed to render it scientifically correct in its minutest details of phytographic diagnosis. From the same author we have the fifth part of "*Phytographiæ Australiæ*," and "*A Monograph of the Plants of the Chatham Islands*." All these works need no praise that I can bestow upon them.

We have also "*A History of the Discovery and Exploration of Australia*, by the Rev. Julian E. Tennison Woods, an account of the progress of geographical discovery in that Continent to the present day," a work which bids fair to be a standard of reference on many matters treated in it. But concerning one subject—the fate of Burke and Wills—I feel it my duty to state my regret, that this talented but youthful author should have lent himself to abuse the Exploration Committee, and to write for sensation. As soon as he approaches the subject of the Exploration Committee, we have a direct insult put upon those gentlemen, and then comes the prophet's tale of lamentation, and weeping, and woe. For his own sake, I will indulge a hope that he never saw, or at least not in time to prevent his unqualified statements about the conduct of the Exploration Committee from appearing in print, the address of my learned and eloquent predecessor in this chair, Professor M'Coy, delivered this time last year, which supplies much information which as a member of the Exploration Committee he was not called upon to meddle with, but which as President of the Royal Society, in adverting to the conduct of the Exploring Expedition, he had a perfect right to disclose. This portion of his



address clears up, to my mind, every doubt which non-members of the Committee might entertain.

A member of that Committee myself, I take to me my share of blame, if there be any, arising out of the sad fate of the Explorers. It is on record that I proposed the leader for election, and there is sufficient also to show that had Mr. Burke acted upon the instructions which I embodied in a minute, and which stands on the records of the Exploration Committee, probably the sad tale of his end, and that of at least two others dear to this Society, would, under Providence, have never need to have been written.

But whether or not, the author of such a work as that upon which I am making a passing observation, should have dealt very carefully with every circumstance hitherto known of the end of the Explorers, and still more so with the reputation and feelings of the members of the Exploration Committee.

It is not my business now to enter into a discussion of these questions, nor to defend myself or any colleague of mine, but I will say this, that I believe, whoever dispassionately looks at the case as stated in Mr. Woods' volumes, will regret the absence of that judicial mind and temper which should always be most carefully maintained when contemporaneous subjects are under consideration.

One regrets that he forgot what some one said about 'Time' being the beautifier of the dead, and that said 'Time' has had no chance yet of doing its amiable office either for Burke or the members of the Exploration Committee.

I am thus lengthy on this work and its talented author, because he has evidently been inspired by feelings other than those which should sway the historian. And seeing that 'history' in its proper meaning could not yet be written of the first successful crossing of Australia and of the fate of

those who first performed the arduous feat, because the whole of the concurrent circumstances are not yet fully before the world—would he not have acted wisely and praiseworthy if he had given such account of the lamented death of Burke and Wills as his work seems to need, in the spirit of Wordsworth's beautiful reflection on the doings of nature amid ruins :—

"Softening and concealing,  
And busy with a hand of healing."

Gentlemen—In concluding this brief address, which I have purposely confined to the labours of the Society, and of members of the Society, permit me to hope that the year on which we are entering will bring out its fruits in due season.

JOHN J. BLEASDALE, D.D.